

How do I use the On-Line Edition of *The Accounting Software Library*?



The On-Line Edition of *The Accounting Software Library* is an easy to use query tool designed to assist you quickly find best-suited accounting and business management systems and learn more about each product and the resellers and ISVs that are associated with that product.

Our objective is very simple. We want to assist you identify that one product with which you can establish an efficient and effective partnership. No more and certainly no less.

- This is a **totally free service** for you and your firm.
- You will control every aspect of this software selection process.
- At no point will you hear from vendors and resellers unless **you** elect to contact them. Unlike many other software selection sites, we do not create lead sheets and pass them on to vendors and resellers. We let you decide who to contact and when.
- While you could take whatever time you require completing your analysis, this site has been designed so that you can be discussing your requirements with selected vendors or resellers the same day you first make contact with us.
- You do not have to complete every step in sequence.
- If you already are interested in a particular product or products, you can start by selecting the option [Learn More About a Product](#) and review information about these products.
- If you are only interested in finding resellers for specific products and learning more about their services, you can immediately select [Find a Reseller](#).
- If you are interested only in finding an unbiased software selection consultant, you can select that option.

Specifically you will be able to

- Create an Account that gives you protected access to *The Accounting Software Library*.
- Access your account as many times as you might require over any period of time. This is particularly useful if you are interested in testing several needs definition scenarios or need input from several people within your organization. Obviously consultants and software resellers will need to access the system for each client and create a unique needs definition file for each client.
- Access all of the software selection functions within the program from a single Needs Analysis Menu.
- Define your requirements in as much detail as might be required.
- Create a quick search for accounting products based on only a very few criteria.
- Create multiple requirements documents if required.
- Identify products that compare favorably against these requirements.
- Learn more about each product that interests you.
- Review ISV product that integrates with a specific accounting system.
- Learn more about each ISV product.

- Find resellers of the products in which you have an interest.
- Learn more about each reseller.
- Find an unbiased software selection consultant.
- Learn more about each software selection consultant.
- Compare the functionality of two products side-by-side.
- Contact vendors, resellers, ISVs and consultants when you are ready to do so.

From this point forward, we will discuss the needs analysis process in some detail so that you will understand how this site works. It is not absolutely necessary for you to read every sentence. The same information is presented for your review at each step in the process. In fact you could return to the Home Page now, create your account, follow the on-screen prompts and start working on your analysis.

What's the difference between the On-Line and CD-Based Editions?

While the purpose of either edition of *The Accounting Software Library* is assisting users define their requirements and identify best suited products, the difference lies in the detail.

The most fundamental difference between the two versions is the cost. The On-Line Edition is free. The CD-Based Edition costs from \$395 to \$1,295 depending on the specific version you purchase. The CD-Based Edition gives users the ability to create a very detailed needs definition, while the On-Line Edition is more of a power search tool.

The CD-Based Edition contains up to 3,500 questions from which you can build a detailed needs definition. The On-Line Edition contains only about 15% of the questions found in the CD-Based Edition.

The CD-Based Edition (which we will continue to sell and update) has been designed so that users can create a very detailed needs definition. This is absolutely required if you are going to be able to provide vendors or resellers an accurate requirements definition list.

If you do not specify exactly what you require, you then leave it up to the vendor or reseller to ask you the right questions. If they fail to ask the questions, you run the risk of purchasing a business management system that does not in fact meet your requirements. I doubt that is something you want to face after you have already spent significant sums of money on the project itself, not to mention the cost of software and implementation.

The CD-Based Edition also contains a complete set of software selection manuals that will literally take you by the hand and lead you through the entire software selection project from the realization that you need to do something to the point where the selected product has been fully implemented. Is the CD-Based Edition worth the price? We have been doing this for 18 years and our subscribers are universal in their delight that such a product exists.

Needs Analysis Menu

The Needs Analysis Menu will be displayed automatically when you log into your account. Each of the functions you can access will be displayed in roughly the same order as you might follow when analyzing your requirements.

- Requirements Documents
 - Create New Document
 - Open Existing Document

- Define Your Requirements:
 - Functional Requirements
 - Modules Required
 - Industry Specific Support
 - System Requirements
 - Multi-National Requirements
 - Software Budget
- Analyze Requirements:
 - Review Needs Definition
 - Rank Products
- Search / Learn / Compare
 - Learn More About a Product
 - Find an ISV Product
 - Find a Reseller
 - Find a Software Selection Consultant
 - Compare Products Side-by-Side

Creating and Accessing Your Account

1. Create a New Account

You must first create an account so that you can access the system. This is a required first step since most subscribers will need to return to the site at some future time. This would be particularly true for accounting software consultants who might use the site for any number of software selection engagements. This is also true for accounting software vendors, ISVs and resellers who need to maintain the information in our database or utilize the program for research purposes.

2. Access Your Account

Once you have created an account, you will select this option to enter the system in the future. While most people will want to create some form of needs definition (and that could be as simple as saying "I am looking for manufacturing products."), we do give you the ability to create simple queries such as learning more about a product without actually having to run any form of needs analysis. You could also find a reseller of a specific product in your geographic region, search for a software selection consultant or generate a report that compares two products side-by-side.

Requirements Documents

1. Create New Document

Some users, particularly consultants might work with multiple clients, each one requiring its own unique Requirements Document. Therefore you will need to create a new (blank) Requirements Document. Once you have given this Requirements Document a unique name, you can immediately begin to define your requirements.

2. Open Existing Document

If you need to exit the system before you have completed your analysis, you can return to the site, open your Requirements Document and work on it some more.

Define Your Requirements

1. Introduction

It is not absolutely required that you complete each of the six requirements definition steps described below before you can determine which products are best suited. We have broken the requirements definition process into six steps to make it easier for our users. As an example you could just define the modules you require and your software budget.

The six steps are:

- Define your functional requirements.
- Identify the modules you need.
- Identify the industry or industries in which you operate if you believe you need a product that serves that industry.
- Define system wide requirements such as operating system, etc.
- Define multi-national requirements such as language and support in other countries.
- Define a software budget ceiling.

2. User Input

We do not assume all of your requirements should carry the same weight. You will have the ability to specify which features are of no interest (simply by leaving the default response as N/A), or which features fall into one of four categories (Low, Moderate, High or Critical). Those requirements that are marked as being of greater importance will then influence the selection process more than requirements marked with a lower level of importance.

3. Define Functional Requirements

The whole section marked as Define Your Requirements will not be displayed initially, but will open after you have actually created and opened a Requirements Document.

In this step we have extracted from the CD-based edition of *The Accounting Software Library* a representative sample of functional questions regarding what you might typically find in General Ledger, Accounts Payable, Inventory, etc. You will click on the appropriate module name, review the list of displayed features, and select those that best represent your requirements. Please keep in mind the fact that the functional requirements listed in the On-Line Edition represent only about 15% of the total number of requirements listed in the CD-based edition of *The Accounting Software Library*. You might want to consider purchasing the CD-based edition in order to assure yourself that all of your requirements will be taken into consideration.

Remember, you do not have to answer these questions. If you are not interested in including functional requirements in this needs definition, simply skip this whole section.

4. Define Modules Required

We have created a list of 97 modules and applications that can be found in an accounting and business management system. You should review this list and indicate which applications best represent your requirements.

Toggle down through the list of modules and select the ones that you require. In addition, select the relative importance of each module you have selected (Low, Moderate, High or Critical). Skip the modules in which you have no interest. Once you have completed this set of questions, select the Save button at the bottom of the screen and return to the Needs Analysis Menu.

Remember, you do not have to answer these questions. If you not interested in including a list of required modules in this needs definition, simply skip this whole section.

5. Define Industry Requirements

If you believe that your prospective business management system supports companies in your industry, find your industry in this list and check the appropriate response. While The Accounting Software Library does ask detailed functional questions that are relevant to some industries, in most cases we cannot list questions specific to all industries.

Toggle down through the list of industries and pick the ones that best represent the industry or industries in which you compete. Since people (users as well as companies in the software business) might have different names for the same industry, there might appear to be some duplication. Once you have selected the industry or industries in which you compete or have an interest, click on the Save button at the bottom of the page and then return to the Needs Analysis Menu.

Remember, you do not have to answer these questions. If you not interested in including industry requirements in this needs definition, simply skip this whole section.

6. Define System Requirements

System requirements are those that are not associated with a particular module. Here the questions will relate to operating systems, databases, ASP options, etc. Review this list of questions and select those that meet your requirements. Again please keep in mind the fact that you are not required to answer any questions in this section. You could leave them blank initially and possibly bring them into a subsequent analysis. Actually you can create as many Requirements Documents as you wish.

If you are not interested in the listed function, simply skip the question. The default response is N/A. If you are interested in a particular feature listed, click on the field and select one of the four responses (Low, Moderate, High or Critical). Once you have completed the questions, select the Save option at the bottom of the screen and then return to the Needs Analysis Menu. If you have to complete the questionnaire at a later time, you can advance to the bottom of the page, select the Save button and then Save your Requirements Document before you quit the web site. You can return at a later time to answer additional questions or run your needs analysis reports.

Remember, you do not have to answer these questions. If you not interested in including system requirements in this needs definition, simply skip this whole section.

7. Multi-National Requirements

If you need support in other countries or need a different language other than English, select this option to define those requirements. We do not actually discuss exchange rates or anything else regarding the detailed functionality required by a multi-national corporation. Those questions are addressed in the CD-Based Edition of *The Accounting Software Library*.

8. Define Software Budget

Obviously it makes no sense to even consider a product if it is substantially above your budget. We have asked each vendor to give us their best estimate regarding the cost of their product. Since the complexity of each installation will vary as will the number of users, it

is not possible to estimate the final cost of your project. All we can do is help you get headed in the right direction and all we can do is estimate the cost for software only. Please keep these points in mind if you want to use software cost as a requirement.

We would suggest that if cost is a consideration (as an example your budget for software only is \$20,000), rather than selecting the exact dollar value (if it is displayed), that you select a budget figure immediately above where you think you might be. While this might pass through products that are too expensive in the final analysis, it does insure that you are considering all possibilities. The functionality of a product slightly above your budget might actually be the best product for your firm.

8. Save Your Requirements Document

There is no function marked "Save Requirements Document". As you complete each section of the Requirements Document (e.g. General Ledger, Accounts Payable, Modules Required, etc.), you will have an opportunity to save that section and therefore update and save your entire Requirements Document.

Analyze Requirements

1. Review Needs Definition

The last step you should take is the verification of your requirements. While this is not a required step, it is highly recommended. As the example below illustrates, the program will display a list of all of the questions in the On-Line Edition and your responses.

If you did not select a question or even an entire section, those questions will still be displayed. One of the objectives of this final verification is highlighting the questions you did not answer and asking "Are you sure you want to leave this question blank?"

You can review the list on-line or you can print the report. Every report can be prepared for printing by selected the "Printer Friendly Version" option at the top right of each screen.

Once you are satisfied that your Requirements Document is complete and accurate, you should then move to an analysis that will highlight those products that appear to be best suited.

2. Rank Products

Once your Requirements Document has been created, saved, and reviewed for accuracy, you can compare it against each of the products in our database by selecting this option.

a. **Ranking Methodology**

We do not assume that all requirements or all vendor responses are the same. As mentioned earlier, those requirements you defined as being more important will receive greater weight in the ranking analysis. Similarly we take into consideration the fact that each vendor does not just say Yes or No when asked if they support a specific feature. Actually there are eight different vendor responses as described below. In each case we have also indicated in () the symbol that will represent this response in the product comparison reports.

- (1) Yes (Y): The required function or report is supported by the product out-of-the-box
- (2) No (N): The product does not support the requirement at all.
- (3) Report Writer (R): The report can be created, but only via a report writer or by exporting the information to a tool such as Excel.
- (4) Third Party Product (T): The required functionality is not available out-of-the-box, but a Third party Product that integrates with the core accounting system does support the requirement.

- (5) Added Field (A): The data can be tracked by the system by adding a user defined field.
- (6) Future Release (F): The requirement can be met by a known and scheduled future release of the product within 12 months.
- (7) Customization (C): The requirement can be met by the product via a rather low level customization process.
- (8) Modification (M): The requirement can be met, but only if the product is substantially modified.

For each requirement you define, the system will compare that requirement against each product in the database. We will take into consideration the relative importance of your requirement (Low, Moderate, High or Critical) as well as the vendor's response. If a vendor's response is Yes, the product will receive full credit. If the vendor's response is anything but Yes, the product will receive only partial credit. The system will then calculate a total score for each product as well as a Percentage of Needs Met. It is this Percentage of Needs Met that will be used to rank each product, assuming that the product met your specified software budget. If the product cost exceeds your software budget, it will be eliminated from the analysis.

b. **Initial Ranking Report**

Once the Percentage of Needs Met has been calculated and the system determines that a product meets your software budget (if you defined one), it will display on-screen a Ranking Report that lists in descending order the products according to their percentage of needs met.

Several product names may be displayed in bold. These products have been certified by Solutions. Product Certification is a voluntary program to which vendors subscribe. Solutions meets with these vendors on a regular basis (primarily after a major release) and makes each vendor prove that they do what they claim they do in terms of functionality.

If you want to learn more about any of the products in this report, click on the product name and you will be taken to the Product Web Page for the product. You can also hyperlink to any Product Web Page by selecting the Learn More About a Product link on menu list to the left of your screen.

If you want to compare your requirements in detail against any of the products in the Product Ranking Report, select the Detailed Requirements Report option.

c. **Detailed Requirements Report**

Although the Product Ranking Report will allow you to see how each product compares against your needs definition, it is just a summary report. If you want to compare each of your individual needs line-by-line, you should generate the Detailed Requirements Report. Please keep in mind the fact that you are not restricted to a single pass through the needs analysis process. Some users start with an analysis of their most important requirements. Then they add additional requirements to see if the ranking has changed. Other firms create entirely new Requirements Documents. Since the program allows you to create and save an unlimited number of Requirements Documents, you can do whatever you feel works best.

Once you select the Detailed Requirements Report option, the system will display a grid that is essentially a duplicate of the Detailed Requirements Report with a Select column added to the right hand side of the grid.

Search / Learn / Compare

1. Learn More about a Product

Once you have completed your analysis, you can now begin to learn more about each product that appears to be of interest. You can also access this function without having to run an analysis. Simply select the option on your Search / Learn / Compare. In addition when you run the Product Ranking Report, you will be able to click on any product name in that report and hyperlink to the Product Web Page. The Product Web Page will present for your consideration information regarding the product as well as the vendor. This information has been submitted by each vendor and therefore is of a marketing nature as well as helping you understand where the vendor positions the product. You can also hyperlink to the vendor's web site as well as view contact information for the vendor should you wish to contact them.

2. Find an ISV Product

Many accounting and business management vendors have developed relationships with third party developers that create add-in products that integrate with their systems. Each of these products will be listed on the Product Web Page. In addition you can search for these products from the Search / Learn / Compare. Select from a list of all products in our database the product you want to research. The system will then display a list of all ISV products that integrate with the selected product. Regardless of whether you are using the Product Web Page or the search function on the Needs Analysis Menu, you can hyperlink to the selected ISV Web Page by simply clicking on the selected ISV product name.

The ISV Web Page will present for your consideration information regarding the product as well as the ISV vendor. This information has been submitted by each vendor and therefore is of a marketing nature as well as helping you understand where the vendor positions the ISV product. You can also hyperlink to the ISV vendor's web site as well as view contact information for the vendor should you wish to contact them.

3. Find a Reseller

Most of the vendors in our database have adopted an indirect sales strategy through a reseller channel. If you want to find a reseller of a specific product in your geographical region, select this option from your Search / Learn / Compare. The system will ask you to specify your "home" as well as the name of the product in which you have an interest. We have utilized a three tiered structure to assist users find resellers and consultants. If you are located in a specific state, select that option. If you are located in Canada, select your home province. Finally, if you are located in some other region of the world, select that region.

If there are any resellers of that product in your geographical region, the system will display the names found. From this list you can hyperlink to each firm's Reseller Web Page. If there are no resellers in the specified geographic region, the system will display a warning message. If the vendor does not utilize a reseller channel or no resellers for the product are in your geographic region, the system will display an error message. In this case you should return to the Product Web Page and contact the vendor.

Each participating reseller will create a Reseller Web Page. These documents are similar to the Product Web Page in that they have been designed in part to help you understand the services the reseller provides and the industries in which they have developed a specific expertise. Since the page has been created by the reseller, the information presented will be of a marketing nature.

4. Find a Software Selection Consultant

This function is structured exactly like the search function when you are looking for a reseller. The system will ask you to specify your "home" and will display the names of consultants in your geographic region. If there are no consultants presently listed in your geographic region, the system will display a warning message and then display the names of all consultants in our database.

Each participating consultant will create a Consultant Web Page. These documents are similar to the Product Web Page in that they have been designed in part to help you understand the services the consultant provides and the industries in which they have developed a specific expertise. Since the page has been created by the consultant, the information presented will be of a marketing nature.

5. Compare Products Side-by-Side

If you want to create a report that essentially ignores your requirements and concentrates only on the functions of one or two products, you should select the Compare Products Side-by-Side option. This report lists all of the features in the database and the response of each product you select. Currently you can select only two products. The format of this report is similar to the Detailed Requirements Reports, but without a column that lists your requirements.

If you select this report option, the system will display a grid listing in alphabetical order each product in our database. Select the products you want to have in the report and the system will list all of the features in our database and the response for each product selected.